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Democrats Assail Reagan on Bombing

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 26 — Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan today challenged President Reagan's comment that the bombing of the United States Embassy in Lebanon was, in part, a result of a "near destruction" of American intelligence capability "before we came here."

Apparently assuming Mr. Reagan

was alluding to the Carter Administration, Mr. Moynihan, vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, called the comment "false" and "reckless" in a Senate speech. The New York Democrat also released a letter to him from the Director of Central Intelligence, William J. Casey, a Reagan appointee, in which Mr. Casey says that "the increase in personnel and budgetary strength of the agency began in 1979," under President Carter.

Other Democrats in Congress were also quick to criticize Mr. Reagan's remarks today before students at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. The Senate minority leader, Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, said Mr. Reagan's comments represented "the ultimate disappearing act."

Referring to the attack on the Embassy near East Beirut, Mr. Byrd said: "It's one thing to be able to stage-manage walking away from these disasters, but it's another thing to try and leave the impression that they didn't even happen on your watch."

Decline Stopped in 1978

Mr. Moynihan said the decline in funds for the American intelligence community stopped in the fiscal year 1978, the first full budget year of the Carter Administration. This process continued, he said, through four consecutive budgets prepared under Mr. Carter. Mr. Reagan, he said, "has utterly misrepresented the facts."

"The President has all but invited further terrorist attacks on American lives by telling the world we are unprepared to thwart such attacks," Mr. Moynihan said. "The statement undermines — I am prepared to say betrays — almost a decade of sustained bipartisan efforts in the Congress to reconstruct an intelligence community whose budgets had run down steadily through the first half of the 1970's and began to rise sharply in the second half." No precise amounts were mentioned, because intelligence budget figures are classified.

Remarks similar to Mr. Reagan's were made in December by the White House spokesman, Larry Speakes, after the attack on the Marine garrison in Beirut in which 241 Americans were killed.

Debate Over Partisanship

Mr. Moynihan responded to those remarks in a letter to Mr. Casey dated Feb. 2. In the letter, which Mr. Moynihan released today, he said: "Now you know and I know that this is not true. These sorts of denunciations pose a genuine danger to the bipartisan spirit of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence."

In Mr. Casey's reply, dated March 8, which Mr. Moynihan also released today, the Director said he was "particularly pained" by published reports that the Central Intelligence Agency's "revival will be a partisan political theme in the re-election campaign."

"All of us know," Mr. Casey wrote, "that the increase in the personnel and budgetary strength of the agency began in 1979, that it was planned and proposed earlier and that it cannot be completed without strong bipartisan support. I fully share your conviction that the vital functioning of this agency cannot be risked or impaired through any use of C.I.A. for partisan political purposes. The protection of our national security, to which both this agency and your committee are so fully committed, is too important a mission to subject to the vagaries of the political process or the partisan purposes of either party."

"You have my assurance that I will not tolerate any attempt to politicize the agency or its work," he said, "or use the fact of its revitalization for partisan political purposes." Mr. Casey's letter concluded by saying that any partisan use of the C.I.A. would damage the rapport and trust that was necessary between the agency and the Senate intelligence committee.

In his Senate speech, Mr. Moynihan characterized Mr. Reagan's comments as "ghastly, grim, ghoulish, in the aftermath of another tragedy to blame it on the previous Administration."

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